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ABSTRACT

SERVE, the Southeastern Regional Vision for Education, is a consortium of educational organizations whose mission is to promote and support the continual improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast United States; SERVE is one of the ten Regional Education Laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education. In the fall of 1997, SERVE and the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL) held a conference in Fort Mill, South Carolina, the goal of which was to develop a model conference to help state policymakers turn research into policy and policy into practice. This booklet summarizes the proceedings of this conference. The booklet's contents are: (1) "Conference Summary"; (2) "Conference Background"; (3) "The Conference: Day 1," which covered research on quality early childhood programs, defining quality, and policy barriers to quality; (4) "The Conference: Day 2," which covered policy options for addressing barriers to quality; (5) "Conference Evaluation"; and (6) "Follow-Up Efforts." The booklet also contains the conference agenda, a list of participants, and information about SERVE and ordering SERVE publications. (EV)

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# 1997 Proceedings

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# *Early Childhood in the Carolinas*

## Research to Policy to Practice

PS 027050

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SERVE
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education

National Center for Early Development & Learning

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**SERVE**
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# Acknowledgments

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# Conference Summary

In the fall of 1997, SERVE and NCEDL held a conference in Fort Mill, South Carolina. The goal of the conference was to develop a model conference to help state policymakers turn research into policy and policy into practice. Nationally known researchers and early childhood policy and decision makers from North and South Carolina convened for this conference. Participants discussed current research findings and their implications for policy and programs. New models for addressing policy barriers to quality programs for young children and their families were developed.

# Conference Background

SERVE, one of the ten Regional Education Laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education, was charged with providing policymakers with the most current and relevant information pertaining to recommended practices in early childhood education. NCEDL, one of the U.S. Department of Education's newly funded Research Centers, had a responsibility to develop a summit on child care to bring together those who make policy, those who implement policy, and those who study policy. Through the collaborative efforts of both of these federally funded groups, researchers in 1996 began discussing the possibility of a joint conference.

In early 1997, SERVE's Early Childhood program staff conducted focus groups in five of the six states that comprise the SERVE region to determine what the policy issues were for these states (Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina). In addition, a survey was distributed in the sixth state, Alabama. Based on the results of those focus groups and the survey, SERVE identified topics that participants requested for the policy conference. They also compiled presentation suggestions, potential speakers, recommendations on who should be invited to attend, dissemination results and strategies, and expected outcomes. At the same time, NCEDL strand members were surveying the literature, discussing plans with NCEDL research advisors, and doing preliminary planning in support of the process.

Invitations for the conference were sent to researchers at SERVE and NCEDL and to numerous child care policymakers, advocacy groups, officials of child care organizations, school officials, community college officers, and representatives of professional groups in North and South Carolina. (See participant list in the appendix.)

Prior to the conference, SERVE and NCEDL representatives produced a notebook for each participant which included selected research findings, policy papers, impact studies of federal policies, and other materials directly related to policy and child care.

# The Conference: Day 1

More than 70 participants convened in the Radisson Grand Resort, Fort Mill, SC, for the noon start of the conference on September 29, 1997. (See attached participant list in the appendix.) Opening remarks were made by Dr. Roy Forbes, Executive Director of SERVE; Dr. Jim Gallagher, Director of Policy Studies at Frank Porter Graham (FPG); and Nancy Livesay, Director of Early Childhood at SERVE.

The afternoon consisted of three speakers from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill presenting the latest research findings. Between speakers, SERVE staff facilitated group discussions and conducted group activities to inspire sharing of information.

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**Dr. Donna Bryant**, an investigator with Frank Porter Graham, spoke first on the following question: "What does research tell us about quality programs for young children and families?"

Informing participants on the most current research applicable to the issues at hand, Dr. Bryant reported that, according to the official government definition of poverty, a quarter of the nation's children live in poverty. She pointed out that during the last 50 years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of working mothers, the number of single mothers, and the number of mothers who return to work before their children reach age one.

Citing data from Head Start and Smart Start studies, Dr. Bryant said that a significant correlation exists between program quality and outcomes for children. Outcomes related to quality include cooperative play, sociability, creativity, ability to solve social conflicts, self-control, and language and cognitive development. Children who attended community child care programs the year prior to kindergarten scored higher than children in the other groups on individual assessments of language and math and were rated higher by their kindergarten teachers on social skills and communication development. In summary, she noted that positive outcomes appear to be associated with more developmentally appropriate classes.

Dr. Bryant also stated that research has shown that the education of child care center staff is positively related to the quality of care. Two recent studies found that only a small percentage of teachers in child care programs have a bachelor's degree or higher. Turnover rate in child care centers is high, ranging from 25 to 50 percent per year. This means that children are constantly adapting to new caregivers, and administrators are constantly orienting and training staff. Child care center staff compensation, including benefits and wages, is exceptionally low. Child care staff are among the lowest paid of all classes of workers in the United States.

Following Dr. Bryant's talk, participants discussed the implications of research for policy to practice. During their discussion, participants were asked to consider such questions as, "Should all states have Pre-K? Why or why not?"

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**Dr. Dick Clifford**, a Frank Porter Graham investigator and Associate Director of NCEDL, was the next presenter. He questioned, "Can we define quality? Do we know it when we see it?"

Citing the *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study* (1995), Dr. Clifford reported that the quality of care in child care centers around the country is often mediocre. Of more than 400 centers studied in four states, only eight percent of infant and 24 percent of preschool classrooms were of good or excellent quality. He noted that 10 percent of preschool programs and 40 percent of infant programs were rated as having poor quality. Less than 25 percent of children enter school without some previous experience in child care or pre-school.

The study further revealed that the level of training for teachers in child care centers varies widely from program to program and by type of sponsor. The three most significant factors in predicting outcomes for children, based on data from the *Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study*, are child-staff ratios, staff education, and the prior experience of program administrators. Further analysis of the data identifies characteristics that distinguish among centers of poor, mediocre, and good quality. The most important discriminators included how much teachers are paid, the number of years of school that teachers have, and the amount of specialized teacher training.

Dr. Clifford noted that in 1993 the average cost for a child at a child care center was $86 per week. That figure is probably now more than $100 and more than $120 a week for true quality care. In other words, he said, in the four

years before a child is in child care prior to entering school, the parents will pay approximately $20,000. This is about the amount a middle class family would pay for a nice car.

In summary, Dr. Clifford said that people know what quality is in a car and how to evaluate it, but identifying quality child care is not always clear to parents. Parents require help in making choices, and America lacks a system that weeds out very poor programs. He said the nation needs the will and the resources to take action. Following Dr. Clifford's presentation, SERVE staff facilitated a discussion on the implications for policy from Dr. Clifford's speech.

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Finally, **Dr. James Gallagher** spoke on the topic, "What are policy barriers to quality?"

He stated that there are no simple answers to questions on child care policy. Strong leadership is essential in persuading people to change, despite initial resistance. Social policies are the rules and standards by which scarce public resources are allocated to almost unlimited social needs.

Written social policy should provide the answer to four major questions:

- Who will receive the resources?
- Who will deliver the resources?
- What is the nature of the resources?
- What are the conditions under which these services will be delivered?

Success in policy implementation depends on knowing the nature of barriers so that effective strategies can be devised to overcome them, Dr. Gallagher noted. He presented the following examples of barriers: institutional, psychological, sociological, economic, political, and geographic. For each barrier, he discussed approaches to overcoming it or at least to better understanding it. After Dr. Gallagher's presentation, SERVE once again led a discussion on implications for policy and practice through a group activity.

# The Conference: Day 2

The second day opened with Dr. Gallagher helping the group apply the previous day's information by introducing some tools and speaking on "Policy and Program Options: A Model for Addressing Barriers." Dr. Gallagher distributed a policy-options decision matrix to participants and demonstrated the use of a decision-making matrix. The exercise questioned, "Who cares for the children? If there is a collective obligation of a society to aid families in the care of young dependent children, how should such aid be provided?" These were the options listed:

- Lower the age for children to begin public schools.
- Set up programs for children with special needs.
- Give incentives for companies with more than 150 employees to create child care programs for their employees.
- Provide direct subsidies for child care centers.
- Use parent vouchers for child care.
- Give tax credits to parents.
- Maintain the status quo.

Each option was then considered in light of these criteria:

- Additional costs
- Vertical equity
- Program effectiveness
- Personnel needs
- Political acceptance
- Public acceptance
- Other considerations

To demonstrate, Dr. Gallagher asked participants to consider the first option: if North Carolina lowered the age for children to begin school, it would cost between $400 million and $600 million. Then, with Dr. Gallagher's assistance, the participants filled out the matrix for practice.

After Dr. Gallagher's presentation, the participants were divided into groups by state. SERVE policy staff, Dr. Vicky Mikow-Porto and Chip Jackson, and NCEDL staff, Dr. Robin Rooney, facilitated the group work. Each state selected a specific research finding to be turned into policy and then to be worked through a decision-making matrix. Each state group could also break into smaller groups to work on related issues. For example, one group from North Carolina designed their matrix to focus on how to increase the education/training of the early child care and education workforce. Another group built its matrix around the issue of increased family involvement to ensure children's optimal growth and development.

Once the matrix was completed, each group was directed to choose one or more options based on their work. Having done that, each group then listed the next steps necessary to take in making policy. A spokesperson from each group then gave a summary of their group's work to all participants.

Dr. Forbes delivered the closing remarks:

> I am extremely optimistic. We've got the research base. We see a growing need. Welfare reform will result in an even larger need in the early childhood area. With a booming economy, I feel people will be a little more "sharing" in their tax dollars. And I have great faith in politicians because they will look for something to capture public attention. We have a great opportunity to have a dramatic impact on the future of early childhood education and development in America.

On that note, the meeting was adjourned.

# Conference Evaluation

To assess the immediate impact of the conference and the effectiveness and replicability of this model, participants were asked to complete a brief survey. The survey was designed to determine participants' overall satisfaction with the conference, as well as with specific topics, activities, and speakers.

In general, conference participants expressed high approval and satisfaction with selected speakers and discussion activities. When asked about specific benefits received, most participants mentioned the opportunity to meet and network with representatives of other agencies and organizations. Others cited the opportunity to exchange new ideas and engage in joint planning as the major benefit received.

In terms of changes anticipated as a result of the policy conference, most participants did not envision specific policy changes. They did, however, believe that the discussion and planning which began at the conference would continue once participants returned to their respective jobs and duties.

To improve the conference and make it more useful to policymakers, most participants emphasized the need for more time to process information received and to work within their state teams. Although the conference was originally designed to minimize the amount of time that policymakers had to spend away from their work, the feedback received indicated that participants may actually benefit from additional time.

There also was some concern that participants were not allowed adequate time to network across states. While they were able to meet and work with representatives from their own state, several of the participants expressed a desire to connect with individuals from outside their state, particularly those from a parallel agency.

Finally, participants were asked to comment on the overall effectiveness of the conference as a means of discussing specific issues and planning possible solutions. Most participants indicated that the conference was helpful toward providing important information and identifying critical issues; however, there was some concern that the persons actually responsible for making policy (e.g., governor's office staff, key legislators, other elected officials) were not present at the conference.

# Follow-Up Efforts

As a result of some of the work that began at the conference, efforts to address early childhood issues are continuing in North Carolina and South Carolina. For example, in South Carolina, John Niblock, President/CEO of Alliance for South Carolina's Children, has been working with others, including Rep. Govan, to address the issue of quality child care. This legislative session has seen the introduction of several key bills designed to improve the care and education of young children.

In North Carolina, a task force that was formed at the September meeting has continued to meet and is planning a conference to be held this coming fall. The conference is co-sponsored by Day Care Services, Frank Porter Graham Center, and the Center for the Child Care Workforce and will bring together planning teams from various states to focus on the issue of compensation.

In addition to work that is happening within the states, SERVE and NCEDL are continuing their efforts to bring the most recent early childhood research to policymakers and offer strategies for effective policy decision making. Most recently, NCEDL and SERVE conducted follow-up training in Atlanta, GA, for SERVE policy staff, the Regional Education Laboratories' Early Childhood Laboratory Network Program members, and policy representatives from state and national early childhood groups.

Finally, there are plans underway to adapt and replicate the model in other states within the SERVE region. SERVE and NCEDL hope to target two additional states this fall and, once again, help bridge the gaps between research, policy, and practice.

# Agenda

## Early Childhood in the Carolinas: Research to Policy to Practice

### Day 1

| | |
|---|---|
| 12:00PM – 1:00PM | **Luncheon**—Grand Ballroom West |
| | ***Welcome and Introductions:***<br>**Roy Forbes**, SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)<br>**Jim Gallagher**, National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) |
| 1:00PM – 2:30PM | **Speaker—Donna Bryant, NCEDL:** *"What does research tell us about quality programs for young children and their families?"* |
| | **Discussion Facilitators—Nancy Livesay and Roy Forbes, SERVE:** *"What are the implications for policy and practice?"* |
| 2:30PM – 2:45PM | **Break** |
| 2:45PM – 4:15PM | **Speaker—Dick Clifford, NCEDL:** *"Can we define quality? Do we know it when we see it?"* |
| | **Discussion Facilitators—Nancy Livesay and Roy Forbes, SERVE:** *"What are the implications for policy and practice?"* |
| 4:15PM – 5:45PM | **Speaker—Jim Gallagher, NCEDL:** *"What are policy barriers to quality?"* |
| | **Discussion Facilitators—Nancy Livesay and Roy Forbes, SERVE:** *"What are the implications for policy and practice?"* |
| 6:15PM – 7:00PM | **Reception**—Cash Bar outside the Trellis Room |
| 7:00PM – 9:00PM | **Buffet Dinner**—Trellis Room |

### Day 2

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:00AM – 8:30AM | **Continental Breakfast**—Grand Ballroom West |
| 8:30AM – 9:15AM | **Jim Gallagher, NCEDL**—Presentation of program planning/decision model: *"Policy and program options: A model for addressing barriers."* |
| 9:15AM – 11:45AM | **State Team Meetings:** *"What are our goals and options for increasing quality in programs for young children and families?"*<br>**NC**—Facilitated by Vicky Mikow-Porto, SERVE, and Robin Rooney, NCEDL<br>**SC**—Facilitated by Chip Jackson and Nancy Livesay, SERVE |
| 11:45AM – 12:00PM | **Break** |
| 12:00PM – 12:30PM | **Participant Panel Discussion:** *What have we learned? Where do we go from here? What are the implications for policy and practice in our states?"*—Facilitated by Robin Rooney, NCEDL |
| 12:30PM – 1:30PM | **Lunch, Wrap-up, and Charge to States:** Roy Forbes, SERVE |
| 1:30PM | **Adjourn** |

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# About the SERVE Organization

SERVE, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, is a consortium of educational organizations whose mission is to promote and support the continual improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. Formed by a coalition of business leaders, governors, policymakers, and educators seeking systemic, lasting improvement in education, the organization is governed and guided by a Board of Directors that includes the chief state school officers, governors, and legislative representatives from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Committed to creating a shared vision of the future of education in the Southeast, the consortium impacts educational change by addressing critical educational issues in the region, acting as a catalyst for positive change, and serving as a resource to individuals and groups striving for comprehensive school improvement.

SERVE's core component is a regional educational laboratory funded since 1990 by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. Building from this core, SERVE has developed a system of programs and initiatives that provides a spectrum of resources, services, and products for responding effectively to national, regional, state, and local needs. SERVE is a dynamic force, transforming national education reform strategies into progressive policies and viable initiatives at all levels. SERVE Laboratory programs and key activities are centered around

- Applying research and development related to improving teaching, learning, and organizational management
- Serving the educational needs of young children and their families more effectively
- Providing field and information services to promote and assist local implementation of research-based practices and programs
- Offering policy services, information, and assistance to decision makers concerned with developing progressive educational policy
- Connecting educators to a regional computerized communication system, so that they may search for and share information and network
- Developing and disseminating publications and products designed to give educators practical information and the latest research on common issues and problems

The Eisenhower Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education at SERVE is part of the national infrastructure for the improvement of mathematics and science education sponsored by OERI. The consortium coordinates resources, disseminates exemplary instructional materials, and provides technical assistance for implementing teaching methods and assessment tools.

The SouthEast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium (SEIR◆TEC) serves 14 states and territories. A seven-member partnership led by SERVE, the consortium offers a variety of services to foster the infusion of technology into K-12 classrooms. The Region IV Comprehensive Assistance Center provides a coordinated, comprehensive approach to technical assistance through its partnership with SERVE.

A set of special purpose institutes completes the system of SERVE resources. These institutes provide education stakeholders extended site-based access to high quality professional development programs, evaluation and assessment services, training and policy development to improve school safety, and subject area or project-specific planning and implementation assistance to support clients' school improvement goals.

Following the distributive approach to responding and providing services to its customers, SERVE has ten offices in the region. The North Carolina office at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro is headquarters for the Laboratory's executive services and operations. Policy offices are located in the departments of education in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

## SERVE–Alabama

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***Eisenhower Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education at SERVE***
1203 Governor's Square Blvd.
Suite 400
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-671-6033
800-854-0476
Fax 850-671-6010

***Education Policy Analyst***
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The Capitol, LL 24
Tallahassee, FL 32399
850-488-9513
Fax 850-488-1492

## SERVE–Georgia

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Atlanta, GA 30303
800-755-3277
Fax 404-577-7812

***Education Policy Analyst***
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2066 Twin Towers East
Atlanta, GA 30334
404-657-0148
Fax 404-651-4673

## SERVE-Mississippi

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## SERVE–North Carolina

**(MAIN OFFICE)**

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***Education Policy Analyst***
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## SERVE–South Carolina

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